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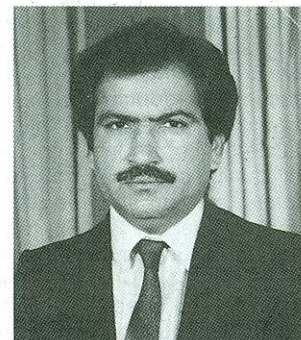
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ARTICLE

In Search of an Effective School Leadership: Some Lessons from Literature

By
Dr. Muhammad Memon, Ph.D.



Introduction

Instead of several education reforms in both developing and developed countries, education has not yet been able to meet the challenges and demands posed by the societal change. Mostly schools are being operated under the industrial world-view that reflects the technical and rational perspective of education. School management follows the tradition of 'boss management' underlying the principles of 'top down' approach, which does not allow schools to develop their own programmes for their students. McNeil (1986) mentions that the school management controls teachers and students, as a result they lose their interest, which has affected the quality of education. Aspinwall (1998) has rightly mentioned that 'Teachers and educationalists have been going through a period of turbulence, beset by criticism from without and self doubt from within. There is a need to draw upon all resources that are available, and schools are increasingly looking to the world outside education for models, systems and structures that will help them to respond more effectively to constant pressure and demands for change' (p.1). On the other hand, Darling-Hammond (1997) believes that 'ordinary schools can succeed in extraordinary ways when they refocus their work on the needs of students rather

than the demands of bureaucracies' (p. 33). It suggests that schools need to have an alternate management mechanism to operate. In their work Crawford and his colleagues (1993) suggest the need of an adequate management leadership that is essential for the implementation of any educational change. Glasser (1990) maintains that 'lead management' encourages the people to devote time and energy to do the quality work. Also Glasser (1990) seems to be inspired by Deming's work (1986) that quality is never the problem rather it is solution to the problem, which can be done through 'lead management' approach.

The lack of effective school leadership has generated an issue of the quality of education in schools which has received widespread attention in the developed countries (see National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983 (USA) and DES, 1985, OFSTED, 1995 (UK) and in the developing countries (Government of Pakistan, 1999 and Memon, 1996). Several studies have been conducted to understand the factors that have affected the quality of education. These studies tend to blame teachers who are not adequately professionally prepared to face the challenges of teaching as a profession. However, only few studies have identified the school leadership as one of the significant factors that affects the quality of education. In Pakistan, the role of school leadership in primary and secondary schools has not yet been fully recognised which shows that the people are not yet aware of the significance of headteacher's role in the improvement of quality of education. Even the headteachers themselves are not aware of their role and responsibility.

This led them to act as administrators rather than professional management leaders. In his work Memon (1998), has addressed the issue related to recognition of headteacher's role in education system. They should be encouraged to provide necessary leadership to teachers, students and others. This will help them to appreciate and value their role and they will be able to provide professional support and guidance to the teachers. This will generate an 'inside' school leadership, which will encourage headteachers to make their school effective. However, there is a need to develop a broad and shared consensus about the need of school leadership. This paper discusses the notion and implications of school leadership for school effectiveness and improvement.

Knowing About School Leadership

There is a generally held opinion among the educators and researchers that school improvement is directly related to the nature of school leadership. It guides, influences and leads teachers and others in schools. Sometimes, the term management and leadership are interchangeably used but it is necessary to draw a distinction between them. Generally, school management deals with the planning, coordinating, and organising of school whereas school leadership deals with transformation of school for accomplishment of its goals. Terry cited in Smith and Piele (1996) that leadership is the activity of 'influencing people to strive willingly for group goals' (p.2). They further mention that 'Good leaders operate out of a clear understanding of their val-

ues, goals and beliefs and also those of their followers' (p.3). Southworth (1998) maintains that 'leadership is not just activity by an individual in a social setting, it is a social act with others' (p.8). The studies on understanding influence of primary headteachers, conducted in the context of UK (e.g. Coulson, 1976, Alexander, 1984, Southworth, 1995) Southworth (1998) suggest that 'leadership is concerned with achieving goals, working with people, in a social organisation, being ethical and exercising power' (p.9). Drawing upon the work of Louis and Miles (1990), Fullan (1991) mentions that leadership involves articulating a vision, getting shared ownership, evolutionary planning whereas management concerns with negotiating demands and resources, co-ordinated and persistent problem coping. Since headteachers work in the specific contexts they play a dynamic and multidimensional role. I agree with Southworth (1998) that schools are to be managed and led, therefore, importance of management and leadership cannot be denied, nevertheless, there is no substitute for leadership. Southworth (1998) mentions that 'Leadership involves an ongoing process of meaning making where the leaders are forever reading of their actions and those of others to develop understanding of what is happening and what is means for these actors, themselves and the school as a whole. Leadership is an intellectual activity and leaders are rarely at a loss for something to think about in terms of their work (p.32). In the context of U.K, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA, 1996) has identified six features of school leadership which includes judgement, omnipresence, personal style, shared leadership,

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building team and developing the team. This view presents the school leadership as a considerate, compassionate, proactive and dynamic, which makes things happen. In other words, leadership itself is a vehicle to provide a vision to schools for their transformation. Thus, headteachers as educational leaders have to be different from the headteachers who are just engaged in maintaining status quo rather than making moving schools. We are about to enter the 21st century, we need to have a strong school leadership who should have a deeper understanding of education, charismatic style and proactive to create the community of learners in the schools.

Literature on school management and leadership describes the following types of leadership:

- Situational leadership which varies according to the level of maturity of the followers (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982)
- Instrumental and expressive leadership. The instrumental part deals with the concerns for accomplishing task and expressive leadership highlights the awareness of the leaders about the concerns of the people. The instructional leadership includes setting school-wide goals, defining school's purpose, providing resources needed for learning, appraising teacher, co-ordinating staff development activities and creating collegial atmosphere (De Bevoise, 1984). The instruction leadership adopts different styles for not maintaining smooth running school but it disturbs equilibrium in order to challenge assumptions and bring about improvements in teaching learning (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) found out three major dimensions of the instructional leadership: defining school mission, managing the instructional programme and promoting a positive learning climate in schools.
- Cultural leadership shapes school culture, which is very subtle. It is direct and indirect, formal and informal and over and covert (Southworth, 1998).
- Transmission leadership similar to a bureaucratic leadership,

which maintains status quo in the school (Memon, 1998).

- Transactional leadership involves a simple exchange of one thing for another. It involves numerous tacit negotiations and trade-offs). It provides the stability and continuity for school to operate efficiently and then the transformational leadership builds upon this foundation (Southworth 1998).
- Transformational leadership deals with the needs and interests of the followers. Transformational leaders create a vision of success (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). They build capacity for change, encourage teachers to act as leaders. Southworth (1998) mentions five attributes of the transformational leadership which includes empowerment, team leadership, development, learning and vision. It leads to develop a leaders of leaders.
- Pedagogical leadership deals with the overall school improvement including children's personal, moral development. The pedagogical leaders are sensitive to the needs of students, teachers and community. They are strategic people and concerned with both task and people and create a community of leaders in schools (see further Memon, 1998).

Bennis (1984) has identified five competencies which includes vision, communication and alignment, persistence, consistency and focus, empowerment and organisational learning. The schools are changing places, therefore, leadership should also change.

Transformational leadership involves considerable social skills of advocacy, inter group relations, team building and inspiration without domination (Foster 1989). Since transformational leaders focuses on developing a collaborative culture, guide teachers and staff in their thinking and feeling, emotions in the schools, the headteachers need to be visionary and imaginary people and an ordinary headteacher may not be able to do that, therefore, Southworth (1995) and Grace (1995) believe that transformational leadership may not be readily adopted in England schools. However, in

many countries, the headteachers pre-empt the collaborative and team leadership.

Implications of School Leadership for School Improvement

There is a substantive body of evidence that schools leaders make difference (e.g. Sammons et al. 1995, Fullan 1991, Dalin et al. 1993 Stoll and Fink, 1996). While highlighting the importance, Sammons et al. (1995) mention that primary and secondary leadership is key factor, which provides vision, values to achieve goals through their approach to change. They further mention that the headteachers establish a variety of forms of support, encouragement and practical assistance to teachers. Bossert et al. (1982) alter us that no simple style of management seems appropriate for all schools, headteachers should find the style and structures most suited to their own local situation. This reveals that leadership is multidimensional and there are many ways of being an effective school leader and there is no single best way to be successful leader.

Hallinger and Heck (1996) emphasise linkages between leadership, school processes and outcomes. They further mention that 'principals achieve results primarily by working through people' (p.26) and thus focus has shifted from instructional leadership to transformational leadership since it evokes a more appropriate range of practices. In their studies Southworth (1990) and Bolam et al. (1993) identified numerous qualities of effective school leaders. I concur with Southworth's (1998) view that school leadership is a complex, organic, unpredictable and contingent upon many factors that we can never be sure of them, therefore, we are only at an initial understanding of effective school leadership. Huberman (1992) also seems to endorse the above point of view that the leadership may have 'too many moving parts' and we need to understand the leadership. Millet (1996) mentions that 'Good professional leadership is the most telling characteristic of an effective school. The best headteachers play a central role in creating a climate in which pupils are able and willing to learn and teachers have the opportunities to do the best job. The Teacher Training Agency (TTA,

1996) emphasised the role of headteachers. It says that 'the headteacher is the lead professional in the school...must provide professional vision, leadership and direction for the school and ensure that it is managed and organised to meet its aims and objectives...headteachers must ensure that the learning and teaching is highly effective and that all pupils achieve to their maximum potential' (p.19). The core purpose of headship is to provide professional leadership and direction for the continuous improvement of the school. When schools move to change the leadership is most critical. Therefore, Fullan (1991) calls headteachers as 'change agents' since they are actively involved in bringing about change in their schools. Southworth (1990) mentions that leadership is not only amalgam of parts but it should be seen as a holistic way embedded in gestalt view that whole is greater than the sum of its parts. He suggests that headteachers should 'work with teachers to shape the school as workplace in relation to shared goals, teacher collaboration, teacher learning opportunities, teacher certainty, teacher commitment and students learning' (p.161). This leads to change the school culture and structure but not all school leaders are change agents. If the school has to improve, a strong leadership has to be provided to schools to achieve the desired targets.

Some Lessons Learned from Literature

Looking at the literature, many prescriptive notions of school leadership have emerged which are detached from reality and are unrealistic and unworkable. We need to avoid using these fancy ideas unless we have tried them out and assessed their implications for school improvement. Hammer (1988) mentions that 'We are inflexible not because individuals are locked into fixed ways of operating, but because no one had an understanding of how individual tasks combine to create a result, an understanding absolutely necessary for changing how the results are created' (p.6). Therefore, the school leadership must have 'know how' about the school structure and its culture. Research suggests that within the same area two schools might be different from each other because of their culture and struc-

ture. Cultural change has to be achieved by structural change or vice versa. Also the pace of change may be different because of the vision, will, commitment, and competence of school leaders. Stoll and Fink (1996) have determined five categories of schools which include moving (effective), struggling (try for effectiveness), sinking (failing), cruising (effective without preparing students for better life) and strolling (neither effective nor effective). In order to work with such schools one should not look forward to seeking a 'magic answer' or 'quick fixes' (Stoll and Myers 1998). This indicates that a single management leadership style may not be applicable to the other school. This shows that leadership is not a simple matter, in fact it requires open mind and heart to conceive and appreciate things in a proper context. I agree with Southworth (1998) that leadership involves a number of concepts and actions including vision, values, the goals of the school and an approach to change and development. Also, no single style is appropriate for all situations. Leaders need to try to find and appropriate fit with the schools' circumstances and context. Leadership should not be considered as a remote control or robot but it should allow staff to have hands-on process of involvement, engagement, participation and empowerment. He further suggests four dimensions of effective leadership ie. evidence based management and leadership, leadership and levels, improving through professional learning, improving the quality of teaching. This will help create community of leaders (Sergiovanni, 1994). Leadership should not be the prerogative of one person, it is collaborative and corporate act. Wtaker (1997) considers leaders as a function of a group rather than an individual. Leadership creates and promotes a sense of accountability through which every body has to do self-evaluation and appraisal and reflect on the wider implications of the positions. This suggests leadership involves obligation and moral responsibilities. Therefore, Sergiovanni (1992) calls it 'moral leadership'.

As discussed above the role of headteachers requires a vision for school to become an educational leader. The headteachers management practices suggest that they are very busy; they hardly reflect on their actions, therefore, they need to

develop a practice to become reflective leaders which will help them to become aware of what and why and how they are doing. The reflective leadership will also help them to overcome the 'tyranny of custom' (Codd 1989) and move away from the rag bag of actions determined by their daily routines. Southworth (1998) emphasises the need of critical reflective leaders who are able to question their ritual practices. Reflective and critical leadership implies a philosophical dimension to leadership through which leaders examine their own beliefs, values, norms, attitude and commitment, which become their 'examined life'.

The critical reflective style of leadership will develop schools as learning organisations that 'discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organisation' (Senge, 1990). He further suggests that the attributes of learning organisations such as systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning. Hodgkinson (1983), cited in Southworth (1998) that 'if the unexamined life is not worth living, then unexamined leadership is not worth following' (p.144). Thus, the leaders need to develop practice and encourage asking questions themselves and others that will help them to think through and develop a school development plan based on their own needs for school improvement. In the context of Pakistan, the role of headteacher has to be reconceptualised in order to develop a shared understanding about it. Literature suggests that without a clear vision about schools the headteachers cannot become leaders. They might be good manager but might not be good leaders. In order to make headteachers as critical and reflective leaders, they need a systematic professional development exposure to improve their management competence and skills. The Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Karachi has already launched a programme in the area of educational management for the headteachers from the public and private sector to make them effective critical and reflective practitioners (see further Memon, 1998). If we want to make our schools 'moving' we have to encourage the headteachers to understand the dynamics of school improvement and create a collaborative culture

through which they can learn from their own experiences and challenges of their role.

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World Declaration on Education for All

Meeting Basic Learning Needs

Preamble

More than 40 years ago, the nations of the world, speaking through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserted that "everyone has a right to education". Despite notable efforts by countries around the globe to ensure the right to education for all, the following realities persist:

- More than 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, have no access to primary schooling;
- More than 960 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women, are illiterate, and functional illiteracy is a significant problem in all countries, industrialized and developing;
- More than one-third of the world's adults have no access to the printed knowledge, new skills and technologies that could improve the quality of their lives and help them shape, and adapt to, social and cultural change; and
- More than 100 million children and countless adults fail to complete basic education programmes; millions more satisfy the attendance requirements but do not acquire essential knowledge and skills;

At the same time, the world faces daunting problems, notably: mounting debt burdens, the threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities among the within nations, war, occupation, civil strife, violent crime, the preventable deaths of millions of children and widespread environmental degradation. These problems constrain efforts to meet basic learning needs, while the lack of basic education among a significant proportion of the population prevents societies from addressing such problems with strength and purpose.

These problems have led major setbacks in basic education in the 1980s in many of the least developed countries. In some other countries, economic growth has been available to finance education expansion, but even so, many millions remain in poverty and unschooled or illiterate. In certain industrialized countries, too, cut-backs in government expenditure over the 1980s have led to the deterioration of education.

Yet the world is also at the threshold of a new century, with all its promise and possibilities. Today, there is genuine progress toward peaceful detente and greater cooperation among nations. Today, the essential rights and capacities of women are being realized. Today, there are many useful scientific and cultural developments. Today, the sheer quantity of information available in the world — much of it relevant to survival and basic well-being — is exponentially greater than that available only a few years ago, and the rate of its growth is accelerating. This includes information about obtaining more life-enhancing knowledge — or learning how to learn. A synergistic effect occurs when important information is coupled with another modern advance — our new capacity to communicate.

These new forces, when combined with the cumulative experience of reform, innovation, research and the remarkable educational progress of many countries, make the goal of basic education for all — for the first time in history — an attainable goal.

Therefore, we participants in the World Conference on Education for All, assembled in Jomtien, Thailand, from 5 to 9 March, 1990:

Recalling that education is a fundamental right for all people, women and men, of all ages, throughout our world;

Understanding that education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation;

Knowing that education is an indispensable key to, though not a sufficient condition for, personal and social improvement;

Recognizing that traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development;

Acknowledging that, overall, the current provision of education is seriously deficient and that it must be made more relevant and qualitatively improved, and made universally available;

Recognizing that sound basic education is fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education and of scientific and technological literacy and capacity and thus to self-reliant development; and

Recognizing the necessity to give to present and coming generations an expanded vision of, and a renewed commitment to, basic education to address the scale and complexity of the challenge; proclaim the following

World Declaration on Education for All:

Meeting Basic Learning Needs.